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Message Text

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44
ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 OMB-01 SSC-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06

SIL-01 DRC-01 /144 W
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R 042020Z JAN 74
FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6529
INFO AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
COMCARIBSEAFRON
CINCLANT FOR POLAD

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE BRIDGETOWN 0023

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: AC, PINT
SUBJ: MAJOR CABINET RESHUFFLE IN ANTIGUA

1. FOLLOWING ANNOUNCEMENT OF MAJOR CABINET REORGANIZATION IN ANTIGUA, FORMER MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS AND LABOR DONALD HALSTEAD HAS EXPRESSED INTENTION TO LEAVE CABINET AND WORK WITH ANTIGUA WORKERS' UNION RATHER THAN ASSUME NEW DUTIES. HALSTEAD DECLINED COMMENT ON REASONS FOR RESHUFFLE BUT SAID HE WOULD RETAIN HIS SEAT IN PARLIAMENT AND CONTINUE TO SUPPORT GOVERNMENT POLICIES. PREMIER GEORGE WALTER ANNOUNCED REORGANIZATION AT PRESS CONFERENCE JANUARY 2, THUS CONFIRMING RUMORS CIRCULATING SINCE LAST WEEK. BOTH HALSTEAD AND PREMIER'S HALF-BROTHER SELWYN WALTER, FORMER MINISTER OF TRADE, INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE, WERE GIVEN NEW BUT UNSPECIFIED DUTIES IN PREMIER'S MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS. IN OBVIOUS REFERENCE TO PRESS SPECULATION THAT HALSTEAD AND
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SELWYN WALTER WERE BEING DOWNGRADED BECAUSE OF THEIR

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CONTROVERSIAL PRIVATE BUSINESS DEALINGS, PREMIER WALTER SAID THAT REASSIGNMENTS SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED DEMOTIONS AND THAT BOTH MEN WOULD RETAIN FULL CABINET RANK. WALTER EMPHASIZED THAT CHANGES DESIGNED TO CORRECT ADMINISTRATIVE WEAKNESSES IN FORMER CABINET STRUCTURE AND TO ENABLE HIM TO GIVE MORE EFFECTIVE DIRECTION TO GOVERNMENT.

2. OTHER CABINET CHANGES AS FOLLOWS: GERALD WATT, FORMERLY MINISTER OF PUBLIC UTILITIES AND COMMUNICATIONS, BECOMES MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY, LEGAL AFFAIRS AND LABOR; VICTOR MCKAY, FORMERLY PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CULTURE, BECOMES MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS, HOUSING AND COMMUNICATIONS, AND SYDNEY PRINCE, FORMERLY MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND HOUSING, APPOINTED MINISTER OF FINANCE, INDUSTRY AND TOURISM. CHANGE INVOLVES REDUCTION FROM SEVEN MINISTRIES TO SIX WITH SHIFTING OF SOME PORTFOLIOS AND CONSOLIDATION OF OTHERS. FINANCE PORTFOLIO, FORMERLY HANDLED BY PREMIER, NOW INCLUDES TRADE AND COMMERCE, WHILE HOME AFFAIRS NOW SUBSUMED UNDER NATIONAL SECURITY. SHIFTS ALSO MADE IN ASSIGNMENTS OF TEN PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES.

3. COMMENT: WALTER'S REMARKS NOTWITHSTANDING, CHANGES DO IN FACT MEAN DEMOTIONS FOR HALSTEAD AND SELWYN WALTER, AS HALSTEAD'S REPORTED INTENTION TO RESIGN INDICATES. DOUBTFUL THAT HALSTEAD, WHO HAS SHARED ALMOST EQUAL AUTHORITY WITH GEORGE WALTER SINCE PAIR SPLIT WITH ANTIGUA TRADES AND LABOR UNION AND FORMER RIVAL ANTIGUA WORKERS' UNION IN 1968 AND LATER ASSUMED POWER IN 1971 ELECTION, WILL REMAIN CONTENT WITH DIMINISHED STATURE. BOTH HALSTEAD AND SELWYN WALTER HAVE OPENLY ENGAGED IN PRIVATE BUSINESS DEALINGS WHICH ON OCCASION HAVE EMBARRASSED WALTER GOVERNMENT, THOUGH BOTH HAVE REPEATEDLY DENIED USING PUBLIC OFFICE TO GAIN BUSINESS ADVANTAGES. HALSTEAD IN PARTICULAR HAS BEEN FREQUENT OBJECT OF OPPOSITION CRITICISM FOR HIS INTERFERENCE IN POLICE MATTERS, ALLEGED HIRING OF PRIVATE HENCHMEN, AND INTERVENTIONS IN LOCAL LABOR DISPUTES. CABINET RESHUFFLE IS STRONG INDICATION THAT PREMIER INTENDS TO CHART NEW POLITICAL COURSE, WHICH COULD EARN HIM AND HIS GOVERNMENT GREATER RESPECT AMONG ANTIGUA ELECTORATE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CABINET, PERSONNEL RESIGNATIONS, POLITICAL LEADERS, REORGANIZATIONS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 JAN 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974BRIDGE00023
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: BRIDGETOWN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740163/aaaacgxz.tel
Line Count: 107
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 JUN 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 JUN 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <26 JUN 2002 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

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US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MAJOR CABINET RESHUFFLE IN ANTIGUA
TAGS: PINT, AC, (HALSTEAD, DONALD), (WALTER, SELWYN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

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